

439
262 As far as onions are concerned, the Mossi are familiar with them and call them albasalé, but do not cultivate them. It is the Haoussa, on their way in from Bandiagara, who buy them from the Habé and bring them to the Mossi. The growers themselves sometimes come in large caravans and sell them at Ouagadougou.

248 /484/ We are now finished with the Mossi food crops. Let us proceed to other crops.

Cotton (lamdo or lango in Mossi) is a dry-season crop here rather than a rainy-season crop.

It is planted near the soukala, or else in the bush along the watercourses.

During the winter season, grass along watercourses is cut down and left lying there to fertilize the ground. Then cotton is planted at the end of the rainy season. Holes are made into the earth with the koutiaga, three or four cotton seeds are placed in each hole and then covered up. The cotton emerges from the ground at the end of five or six days. Weeds are pulled out every fortnight. The cotton ripens at the end of 100 days. The stem may reach 75 centimeters or 1.50 meters in height, depending on the quality of the soil. Then comes the harvesting, which extends over a period of thirty or forty days, because one must wait for the pod to burst and the boll to appear before plucking. The women, girls, and small boys do this plucking.

[435] The Mossi grow a considerable amount of cotton and take very good care of their fields. In any case, the soil and climate of the region are rather propitious to this crop. The harvesting is done in February and March. The average local price of cotton is one franc a kilogram.

249 Tobacco is also partly a dry-season crop. At least its cultivation begins during the rainy season, extends into the dry season, and ends only in the latter. Tobacco is grown near the soukala like maize, large red millet, hemp, etc.

Tobacco is sown during the rainy season near the soukala. Twenty-five days are allowed to elapse, and then the plants are dug out and transplanted to another spot near the soukala. When the

249 rainy season ends, the tobacco has already grown tall. In the month of December, one begins to gather the leaves, taking first the lowest ones which are the first to ripen. One keeps plucking up the stem and gathering leaves until the end /485/ of January. Then the tobacco stems are cut down to get the seeds.

276 In order to make tobacco, the leaves are left to dry in the sun, and then, when they are dry, the men crush them in small mortars. They add a little water, stir, and make tobacco balls, or rather small elongated loaves worth one sou apiece. These loaves are entrusted to the women to be sold at market.

249 The Mossi also grow indigo (gara in Mossi, as in Bambara).

During the rainy season, indigo is sown in separate plots. First the grass is removed, and then the ground is struck here and there with the koutiaga. Then indigo seeds are broadcast, and the soil is moved with the ouaka to cover the seeds so that the birds will not eat them. At the end of a fortnight, the indigo begins to shoot. The weeds are removed by hand. The leaves may be gathered forty days later. They are gathered by hand and given to the women, who press them into flat loaves.

● 248 As for hemp (berenga in Mossi, pepan in Nounouma, kanzé in Kassouna, dafou in Mandé), it is sown among the maize that surrounds the soukala as soon as the latter has put forth shoots. The berenga has a long stalk similar to maize and hard to distinguish from the latter, but while maize is harvested in August, berenga stalks are left standing until October or November.

262 Its leaves are used for sauces.

241 Hemp closes our list of food crops and other crops in Mossi territory. Let us close with a few words on agricultural tools.

The basic tool of cultivation, here as in all other parts of West Africa, is the daba. The Mossi have two kinds:

1. The ouaka, a kind of daba with a broad, thin blade. It is used to turn up the soil.

/486/ 2. The koutiaga, koutiara or koutiaba. This is a kind of small hoe which is used to make holes when sowing grain or seeds.

The Mossi also have the following accessory tools:

1. The laré. This is an axe used to cut stumps when a plot is cleared.

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294 closer to our European hats and vaguely recalls a very fat and swollen straw bowler with wide rims.

In order to make the former kind, our hat maker begins by bringing together a hundred strings. He ties them at one end, an end left in its original straw state, and thus fashions the tip of the hat. Then he interlaces these strings by hand with bits of unmodified kansé straw. The strings hang vertically, the straw pieces are interlaced horizontally, and this makes up the web of the hat.

[386] /528/ The bits of kansé are often dyed black beforehand by immersion in the mud of a watercourse. This is how black lines and designs are obtained in certain parts of the hat.

[435] Six days are needed to make a hat. It is sold for 1,000 cowries, of course without the ornaments, straps, and strips of leather that will be added by the shoemaker.

Hat makers fashion these hats in advance and have their wives sell them at market.

248 Bérenga or hemp (also called tamora among the Mossi) goes into the manufacture of straw hats as well. We saw above, when discussing cultivation, how bérenga is grown. It is sown either among maize or among large red millet, that is to say around the soukala, or even in fields in the bush among small millet or large white millet. If sown among maize, it is sown three days afterwards; if among large red millet, four days later; if among large white millet, ten days later; and if among small millet, ten or twelve days afterward.

Bérenga is harvested ten or twenty days after maize, if it stands in a maize field. If it has been sown among millet, it is harvested seven days afterwards. Bérenga stalks are severed at the base, and the fibrous bark is removed and dried. Bérenga is green when fresh and reddish brown when dry. It is usually made into strings and cords. It is also used for the thatch roofing of huts. When it is to go into the making of a hat, it is dyed black by immersion in bérédo and used along with kansé to furnish the black lines of the hats.

Here are some sample products of the Mossi hat-making industry:

1. Pointed straw hats made of kansé (yellow) and bérenga (black). They sport leather ornaments and straps added by the [435] shoemaker. They are worth 2,500 cowries.

● 2484 The Mossi grow tobacco in fields around their
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249 homesteads, where they also cultivate their most important cash crops, cotton and indigo, which are used in the manufacture and dyeing of cotton cloth.

136 The wild fauna of Mossi country include several species of antelope, deer, monkeys, rabbits, snakes, and wild pigs. Elephants roam the beds of rivers and streams and often destroy cultivated fields, while lions and hyenas distress the people by attacking livestock. The pools and rivers of Mossi country are inhabited by turtles, crocodiles, and various species of scaled and scaleless fish. Chickens, muscovy ducks, and half-domesticated guinea fowl are the most valuable species of birds.

231 The Mossi have long been famous for their splendid donkeys and
[492] horses. Donkeys are sometimes ridden, but they are used primarily as
[439] beasts of burden. Horses are important for military and ceremonial purposes and for export to the tsetse-fly zones to the south. The Mossi raise two main types of cattle: a zebu-like animal in the northern regions and a
[439] dwarf variety in the south. These animals are raised primarily for their milk and for export, and are seldom killed for meat until they are fairly old. Goats and sheep provide the main source of meat. Hog-raising is not widespread, and seems to be declining in importance with the increased observance of Islamic food taboos, which is on the uprise even among people who are still pagans.

135 The subsoil of Mossi country is not well known, but so far there have been no major discoveries of mineral deposits. The only known gold field remained unworked in aboriginal times. The Mossi do not like to wear
[301] gold ornaments, preferring jewelry worked from imported copper and
[325] silver. The northern Mossi worked their local iron in aboriginal times, but
[439] those in the south obtained this metal from caravan traders.

175 The nineteenth-century reports of Barth and other European travelers
439 indicate that the Mossi conducted a rather extensive foreign trade. At least
[443] six caravan routes passed through their territory, and traders such as the Hausa and Mandingo visited the important Mossi trading centers at Yako, Pouitenga, and Ouagadougou, where they exchanged Saharan and forest products for Mossi livestock and cloth.⁹

101 The Mossi belong to the Voltaic culture area, a name given by Delafosse to the regions drained by the Black, Red, and White Voltas and their tributaries. The area embraces parts of Mali, the Ivory Coast, Dahomey, the Upper Volta, and northern Ghana.⁶ It includes a vast congeries of peoples such as the Dagomba, Mamprusi, Dagari, Birifo, Senufo, Gurmanche, Gurunsi, Lohi, Bobo, Tallensi, Konkomba, Dogon, Somba, Fulse, and Ninisi, all of whom speak languages belonging to the Gur or Moshi-Grunshi group of

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11: Skinner E-5 (1955-1957) 1964

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economic development should take precedence over everything else in the colonies. The Mossi were to be directly affected by the policies of both Van Vollenhoven and Sarraut. The colony of Haut-Sénégal et Niger was suppressed in March 1919, and replaced by the new colony of Upper Volta, in which the Mossi were the chief ethnic group. Moreover, Ouagadougou was chosen as the administrative center of this new colony.¹⁹

The new Governor of the Upper Volta, Edouard Hesling, who arrived in Ouagadougou in November 1919, sympathized with Van Vollenhoven's views, but was even more interested in economic development. He was determined to transform Ouagadougou from a small town with an indigenous population of about 8,000 and some 76 European soldiers, merchants, and missionaries, into a capital worthy of a colony. Shortly after he arrived, he summoned the Mogho Naba and the traditional ministers and had them recruit some 2,000 salaried and unsalaried men to provide enough mud bricks and wooden beams to complete the construction of eleven administrative buildings before the rainy season began the following May.

Hesling and his administrators believed that the Upper Volta, a country "with such diverse products and such a dense population, could attain an exceptional level of development by acquiring those economic elements which ensure prosperity."²⁰ Cotton was one of those elements. They believed that the Upper Volta "can and should export thousands of tons as soon as an easy and economical way of shipping is established."²¹ By 1925, Hesling had constructed 6,000 kilometers of roads in the Upper Volta, about one-eighth the entire road network of French West Africa. Travelers in the Upper Volta at this time wrote of "the enforced enthusiasm with which the natives, under M. E. Hesling, have thrown themselves into agricultural labor and in particular into the planting of cotton."²²

The administration of the Upper Volta continued to furnish Mossi manpower for the development of the other colonies as well as for the colonial army. In 1922, it was asked to furnish "6,000 workers for the Thies-Kayes railway, renewable every six months; and under the same conditions to furnish 2,000 laborers to build the railways in the Ivory Coast. Similarly, with the consent of the chief administrator of the colony, it was possible to recruit a thousand workers in the regions of Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso for private business in the Ivory Coast."²³ Londres, who visited the Upper Volta in the late 1920's, reports that Mossi country was known as "a 'reservoir' of manpower."²⁴ Burthe d'Annelet reports that during this same period, "The Minister of War [took] 45,000 men each year to compensate for the weakness of our metropolitan recruitment, and

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* 177 to cut down the length of service of our draftees as much as possible."²⁶
 * 648 The Governor of the Upper Volta made full use of the Mossi chiefs to develop the colony, and although some chiefs may have objected to the labor imposed on their subjects, others seemingly approved. In commenting upon cotton production in the Upper Volta, Ossendowski writes:

* 175 Cotton is an artificial crop and one the value of which is not entirely clear to the natives. The chiefs with their superior intellect, seeing the profit to be obtained from the plantation of cotton, are continually enlarging the area of the fields, and resort to draft animals, ploughs, manures, and even partial irrigation of the fields; nevertheless, the great mass of the population submit rather unwillingly to those instructions of the administration which aim at the development of cotton cultivation in the colony.²⁶
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 * 648
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[631] Delavignette's comment on the role of the chiefs in cotton production seems to indicate that they, like their subjects, had to conform to the desires of the French:

[464] [The French] lived at Ouagadougou in the shade of the great Nabas, and because [the latter] possessed servitors and were at the head of docile provinces, [the French] dignified by the name of "custom," and in any case adjudged convenient, this domestication of the peasants whereby they were forced to work in a common field under the authority of the village chief, and for a salary which was theoretically to be distributed among them afterwards. Sometimes cercle guards were stationed in these fields.²⁷
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* 175 The Governor carried out many of Van Vollenhoven's reforms concerning the Mossi chiefs, and instructed his district administrators to
 * 177 respect the chiefs and to seek their aid in governing the people. De Beauminy, an administrator in the Upper Volta, contrasts the old policy with
 * 648
 631 the new:

[643] Not without reason, we followed the rule of regarding the great black chiefs as exploiters of their peoples, and this caused us to introduce and to maintain a policy aimed at reducing their authority. Later on we were compelled to abandon this policy in the face of discouraging results. During the past few years we have restored power and prestige to the Mogho Naba and to his vassals, the Mossi chiefs. They are now paid by us, and they administer their kingdoms and territories under our guidance and under the supervision of an extremely small European staff (one official for every 60,000 inhabitants). The rulers are now helping us to restore, on a newer and sounder basis, a political edifice which had once appeared to be on the point of collapse.²⁸

An official report also stated that the Mossi chiefs

understand that the time of their absolute power, and the privileges of their "medieval lordships," are fated to wear away gradually. Certainly, the main-

- 133 Red and White Voltas are merely a series of small stagnant pools during the dry season. In some low-lying areas around the main water courses, trapped water provides the moisture for dank riverine vegetation.
- 134 The soils of Mossi country are mainly ferruginous with red argils and pure silicates of aluminum predominating in the northern region. The soils in the south are thin, sandy, and formed from the decomposition of crystalline rocks and sandstones. During the dry season the Mossi landscape appears too sterile to produce plant life, but with the first drops of rain the entire country soon becomes covered with the grasses and shrubs which are characteristic of this Sudanese region. The uncultivated but valuable trees of this area include the Baobab (*Adansonia digitata*), the locust bean (*Parkia biglobosa*), the shea-butter (*Butyrospermum parkii*), the tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) and the kapok (*Bombax costatum*). The plants which the Mossi cultivate include varieties of cereals, roots and legumes. Sorghums (*Sorghum vulgare*) and millets (*Pennisetum typhoides*) are their staples, with maize (*Zea mays*) filling the role of a secondary but rather useful crop because its growing cycle is shorter than that of other important crops and it breaks the "hungry period." Maize would be a more important crop to the Mossi if it could grow on soil less fertile than what is normally available around the Mossi compound—the area where it brings the greatest yield. Peanuts, onions, rice, beans, okra, peas and sweet potatoes are other food crops. Tobacco is grown for local consumption, but the crops which have the greatest export value are cotton and indigo, used for making cloth and dyeing it.
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● 248 224 The wild fauna of the country does not provide a major part of the food needs of the Mossi people. The several species of deer and antelope, monkeys, rabbits and wild pig are hunted and used for food.
- 136 But the elephants and lions which are also found in the country are sources of great distress to the people because the former decimate the growing crops and the latter attack and kill the grazing animals.
- 231 The Mossi rear two main types of cattle: a zebu-like one in the northern regions and a small dwarf variety in the south. These animals are kept primarily for their milk and for export, and are seldom killed for meat until they are very old. The animals which provide the Mossi with meat are goats, sheep, chickens and guinea fowls. Pig raising is not widespread and seems to be declining in importance with the increasing observance of Islamic food taboos, even among people who are still pagan. Fish forms only a minor part of the Mossi diet and is obtained mainly from traders rather than from local activities. The Mossi also rear donkeys and horses for which they have